

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter addresses the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on elements of the human environment from actions proposed in the CDCA Plan Amendment. This chapter is organized by environmental element, followed by a description and comparison of impacts from the relevant plan element alternatives.

Land use plans, such as the CDCA Plan Amendment, developed in accordance with Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations, provide landscape level decisions for managing the BLM-administered public lands. As a result, the impact analysis for land use plans level actions tends to be cumulative by nature.

4.11 Noise

Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Recommendations. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). The recommendation, or deferral thereof, of certain rivers or river segments, as eligible for potential Wild and Scenic River designation would have no impact on the noise environment in the planning area.

Visual Resource Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). The assignment of VRM classifications, or lack thereof, would have no impact on the noise environment, as such classifications are based on analyses of existing land uses and landscape quality.

Land Health Standards and Air Quality. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). Adoption of land health standards and air quality management strategy would not impact the surrounding noise environment.

Multiple-Use Classification. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). The proposed multiple-use classifications, or retention of current classifications, would affect the noise environment, with ambient noise levels generally correlating to the intensity of permitted land uses. For example, the Class C (Controlled Use) designation, which is the most restrictive and is assigned to wilderness and wilderness study areas, allows only minimal levels of multiple use, and therefore, can be expected to result in the quietest noise environment. The Class I (Intensive Use) designation, which provides for concentrated uses of land and resources, would be applied to existing sand and gravel mining areas, and generally can be expected to result in the loudest noise environment (Alternative A only). By designating lands within conservation areas as Class L (Limited Use), the proposed classification system would provide for a noise environment that is compatible with habitat conservation objectives.

Habitat Conservation Objectives. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). The implementation of habitat conservation objectives would help define compatible land uses within conservation areas and may require the implementation of additional project-specific mitigation measures to meet these objectives. While the Proposed Plan

would not directly affect the surrounding noise environment, indirect reduced noise impacts would likely be realized. For example, mitigation measures that address the siting, construction and development of improvements (e.g., utility access roads or rights-of-way), would limit vehicular and operational noises to sensitive receptors.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). Determinations of allowable uses consistent with CDCA Plan guidelines would not directly affect the surrounding noise environment.

Fire Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). No direct impacts to the noise environment would occur as a result of fire management categorization, or the lack thereof. These categories would be based on analyses of existing land uses and vegetation types, with a priority placed on protecting life and property.

Special Area Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B and C. The designation of special areas, in and of itself, would not impact the noise environment. However, any proposed changes in land use (e.g., motorized vehicle use, livestock grazing, wild horse and burro management), which would be determined based on management prescriptions for a particular special area, would indirectly impact the noise environment. Where more intensive land uses are prohibited, fewer noise impacts would be expected.

No Action Alternative (D). No new impacts to the noise environment would result from a continuation of existing special area designations.

Land Tenure: Exchange and Sale Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). The proposed adoption of land tenure exchange and sale criteria, or lack thereof, would have no impact on the surrounding noise environment.

Land Tenure: Acquisition Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). The proposed adoption of land tenure acquisition criteria, or lack thereof, would have no impact on the noise environment in the planning area.

Management of Acquired Lands. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). The Proposed Plan or No Action Alternative would not result in impacts to the noise environment. The Proposed Plan was designed to facilitate consistency with the special area designations and surrounding land uses existing at the time.

Communication Sites and Utilities. Proposed Plan (Alternative B). Lands containing wind park and communication site development are exposed to noises from a wide range of sources, including construction equipment, vehicular traffic on access roads, wind turbine operations, and mechanical equipment. The proposed designation of areas for wind parks and communication site development would help minimize potential noise/land use incompatibilities by confining these noise generators to specific

geographic areas, which are best suited for such uses, consistent with habitat conservation objectives. Additional noise attenuation would be achieved by implementing site-specific mitigation measures.

Alternative C. Potential noise/land use incompatibilities would be minimized by confining communication sites and windparks in conservation areas to existing sites, and prohibiting new communication sites and windparks in these areas.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). If no areas were designated at this time, land use compatibility issues regarding noise would still need to be taken into consideration as new development projects are proposed; the evaluation would occur on a project-by-project basis. Potential land use conflicts may arise within conservation areas.

Sand and Gravel Mining. Proposed Plan (Alternative B). Sand and gravel mining operations generate noise from a variety of sources, including excavation equipment, loading and hauling trucks, conveyor systems, routine maintenance activities, and on-site asphalt and concrete plants. The proposed designation of areas for sand and gravel mining operations would help reduce noise/land use incompatibilities between mining operations and sensitive conservation areas. Such an action would confine mining noise to specified areas that are determined to be most suitable for such uses, consistent with habitat conservation objectives. Additional noise attenuation would be achieved by implementing site-specific mitigation measures.

Alternative A. Same as the Proposed Plan, except that the potential for mining noise would be increased given the larger area for allowed activities.

Alternative C. The noise levels in conservation areas would potentially decrease since they would be closed to saleable mineral material extraction.

No Action Alternative (D). If no areas were designated at this time, sensitive resources would still need to be considered when evaluating the compatibility of land use proposals on BLM-managed lands; however, such evaluation would occur on a project-by-project basis. Potential land use conflicts could arise within conservation areas.

Livestock Grazing. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B and C. Discontinuing livestock grazing and the elimination of motorized vehicle and equipment use by lessees within the allotment would result in minor noise reductions.

No Action Alternative (D). Adoption of this alternative would maintain current noise levels associated with motorized vehicle and equipment use by lessees, though such noise levels are minor.

Wild Horse and Burro Program. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). The proposed transfer of the Palm Canyon Herd Management Area to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians (Proposed Plan), retirement of the Palm

Canyon and Morongo HMAs (Proposed Plan and Alternative C), or retention of the HMAs (Alternatives A and D) would not result in impacts to the noise environment.

Motorized Vehicle Area Designations. Alternatives A and No Action (D). These Alternatives would result in continuing existing noise levels from OHVs at Windy Point, Indio Hills, Iron Door and Drop 31. These public lands are remote enough from sensitive receptors to not cause significant noise impacts. Possible exceptions under certain conditions may be nearby residents in the small communities of Sky Valley and North Shore. Noise from motorized vehicles at the Drop 31 location may spill over into the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses.

Proposed Plan (Alternative B) and Alternative C. Under the Proposed Plan and Alternative C, existing noise levels from OHVs would continue at Drop 31. These public lands are remote enough from sensitive receptors to not cause significant noise impacts. The possible exception may be to nearby residents in the community of North Shore under certain conditions. Noise from motorized vehicles may spill over into the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses.

Motorized Vehicle Route Designations. Alternatives A and No Action (D). These alternatives would result in continued ambient noise levels on the currently available route network (73 miles) on public lands. These public lands are generally remote enough from sensitive receptors to not cause significant noise impacts.

Proposed Plan (Alternative B). The Proposed Plan would reduce the available route network to 47 miles, locally reducing noise levels on public lands.

Alternative C. This alternative would reduce the available route network to 27 miles, locally reducing noise levels on public lands.

Special Recreation Management Area. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A and C. The proposed designation of the Meccacopia Special Recreation Management Area would help to reduce the noise environment in this area. The designation would result in the development of a management strategy that would include prescriptions to minimize motorized and mechanical equipment intrusions into the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses, while simultaneously providing for motorized recreational opportunities on public lands surrounding the two wilderness areas. Such a management program would help reduce noise/land use conflicts between wilderness and motorized recreation activities.

No Action Alternative (D). Current levels of noise in the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains area, including both wilderness and non-wilderness lands, would continue.

Stopping, Parking, and Vehicle Camping. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A and B). Limiting stopping, parking, and vehicle camping to within 100 feet of the roadway centerline would confine vehicular and other visitor-generated noises to the immediate

vicinity of the roadway, thereby minimizing noise/land use conflicts in these sensitive areas.

Alternative C. Limiting stopping and parking to within 30 feet of the roadway centerline within ACECs and conservation areas would further minimize noise/land use conflicts in these sensitive areas relative to the Proposed Plan.

No Action Alternative (D). Under the No Action Alternative, stopping, parking, and vehicle camping would be allowed within 300 feet of the roadway centerline in conservation areas, thereby allowing vehicular and visitor-generated noises to extend further into sensitive areas.

Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep Recovery Strategy. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). Minimizing human disturbance in bighorn sheep habitat would have the concurrent benefit of reducing noise impacts.

Hiking, Biking and Equestrian Trails. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). Limiting trail use within Peninsular bighorn sheep habitat would help minimize noise levels generated by hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians, though such noise levels are considered minor.

No Action Alternative (D). Use of all trails on a year-round basis would maximize noise levels generated by hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians, though such noise levels are considered minor.